

four

Quarters

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Friends

• Lorrie Keister

Drusilla, standing on a three-step library ladder, reached to the top shelf and moved a book from right to left, pressing it tightly against the others. Karen was reading out the titles and call-numbers almost faster than Drusilla could see them. She had to concentrate and watch carefully because many of the numerals printed on the spines of the books were rubbed off or barely legible.

"Wait . . . wait . . . I don't see it. That one's missing."

"Look on the next shelf," said Karen, who was sitting comfortably in a student's chair with two drawers of cards on the writing arm.

"Found!" cried Drusilla suddenly, picking a book from the shelf below. Karen repressed the impulse to shush her. After all, it was Christmas vacation; it was morning; the library would not be open to the public until one o'clock.

Drusilla waved the book gracefully in her right hand, began to sway, and grabbed suddenly for the book stack. Half a dozen books tumbled to the floor, slowly, one after another, making a series of sharp whacking noises.

"That does it," said Drusilla. "She'll be after us sure enough." As Karen knelt to pick up the books, the giggling struck them both at once but it was too funny. She couldn't stop laughing, even though she saw Mrs. Forsythe bearing down on them from the circulation desk, straightening the chairs around the tables as she came. Her face was rosy bright,

which meant a state of high excitement of whatever kind. The morning sunshine, streaking forth from the great picture window of the reading room, filtered through Mrs. Forsythe's froth of white hair, giving her a momentary angelic halo as she moved through the glory of light. She held a sheaf of papers in her hand and, as she approached, she peeled off two sheets from the pile.

"That will be enough noise from over here," she said severely, but as she came closer it could be seen that she was in her funny mood. "Here's one for each of you," she said, handing out the xeroxed sheets. "Anybody who doesn't come gets fired."

Drusilla rolled her great black eyes up, around, and down again like the end man in a minstrel show. "Thank you, Massa," she said, bowing, as she reached for the sheet with her long brown arm.

"None of your sass," said Mrs. Forsythe, marching off toward a pair of girls who were working in the children's room. "And keep at that inventory," she called back.

They studied the papers.

COME

COME

CHRISTMAS PARTY

For all Library Staff and Pages

December 21st at 7:30 P. M.

Main Library Assembly Room

YOU ARE INVITED

PUNCH

COOKIES

POPCORN

CAROL SINGING

GIFTS

"Oh, dear," sighed Drusilla. "Do I have to go?" She frowned in her imperious way. Karen often found herself staring impolitely at the soft, blunt features of her friend, transfixed by the elegance of the pale sepia skin and the high-piled glistening black hair, which made the oval head seem too heavy for the delicately carved neck.

She caught herself doing it now: staring. She always did it when she couldn't decide what to say. Just for a moment it flashed through her mind that perhaps Drusilla's reluctance toward the Christmas party had something to do with the race thing. But one should not take that into consideration, she told herself, even if Drusilla was doing so.

"Well, no, you don't have to," she said finally, jerking her eyes downward. "But you wouldn't want to hurt Mrs. Forsythe's feelings, would you? I mean, how would it look if none of the pages from Colfax showed up at the party? Don't you think?"

"Did they have one last year?" Drusilla lapsed into her role as new girl, leaning on the experience of her mentor, Karen.

"Yes, and it wasn't too boring, really. All the kids from each branch stick together—you can imagine. But it was all right. The staff members work hard on it. You better go, kid."

"Oh, all right. Give me another number."

Karen had got over feeling that when she talked to Drusilla she must be careful what she said. That was how she had felt in September, when Drusilla first came to work there. She found herself trying to be nice all the time, saying cheerful, pleasant things. It was a strain.

And Drusilla rather put her off at first. I'll be late every day, probably," she had said in her grand lady manner. Just said it without explaining. As it turned out, though, Drusilla had to come all the way from Sheffield High every afternoon. That meant downtown on the bus to transfer, waiting around probably, and another ride out W. Front St. She was always a half hour late. It cut down on her pay check.

"Next semester why don't you try to sign up for study hall last period?" Karen suggested. "Then maybe they'd let you out early."

"At Sheffield? Never."

"You can do it at Harding," said Karen. "I never did, because it's so close to the library, but I know kids who do."

Drusilla had a bitter little laugh. "That's Harding," she said. "It's different at Sheffield. They have armed guards in the halls. The place is a jail. You wouldn't get out early if your mother was dying."

Karen was afraid even to express surprise. The things you heard about Sheffield were mostly bad. All those black kids with knives and bold, resentful eyes. It was said that the best teachers were all asking for transfers. At Harding there were only ten Negroes, and Karen was acquainted with none of them, so that breaking in Drusilla (the task Mrs. Forsythe had given her) seemed formidable and potentially dangerous like exploring uncharted territory.

But it was like watching a flower unfold. They were shy with each other at first, and said little. When they worked together at the circulation desk, with a mob of little children jostling each other out front, crying, "Me. Me. I'm next!" they sometimes got in each other's way,

and Karen would have to stand waiting while Drusilla flicked through the file with her long brown fingers. She was a rangy girl, who leaped about like a grasshopper when she was hurrying. Standing still, she was rather forbidding, tall and full of an aloof dignity. But it was apparent soon enough that she had an easy-going temperament. Standing behind and to the side, waiting her turn at the file, Karen began her bad habit (she thought) of staring at Drusilla's face.

It was as though she were watching for signs that it was human, like white people's faces. She noted with shame her own surprise as she observed the recognizable expressions of feelings with which she was familiar on the faces of others; the impatient disgust around the mouth when Drusilla could not find a card, the soft assenting smile, the sly side-long glance, the wrinkling nose, the raised eyebrow, and the bent neck. It was all so familiar. The questions she asked were the same ones other new girls asked. Yes, yes, Karen told herself. Of course. And surreptitious tears came to her eyes, a phenomenon on which she did not understand or welcome. It had something to do with the pleasure she felt at her growing feeling of affection for Drusilla.

They became friends. By Christmas vacation they knew each other's secrets: Karen's Roger, Drusilla's Jimmy. Things were somewhat one-sided, however, for Karen had never seen Jimmy, whereas Roger often came to the library to study or to walk Karen home at night. Also there was the matter of their families. Drusilla knew all about Karen's having been taken home to lunch and dinner on occasion, but of Drusilla's family

Karen had met only her father, who came after her when she worked at night. Karen was drenched with curiosity. She did not ask questions, however, but treasured the bits of information which Drusilla offered voluntarily. At any rate the thing she was most curious about—how Drusilla felt about Karen—was a taboo subject. To Karen they seemed to be close friends, uncritical and sympathetic as friends should be.

"That's only day after tomorrow," said Karen now, interrupting the inventory suddenly.

"What is?"

"That party. Thursday. I could get the car." Her eyes widened joyfully. "Want me to pick you up?"

"Mmm," said Drusilla. "You'll never get the car. Anyhow, my Dad will take me down."

"Wanna bet?"

At noon there was the question of lunch. "We could go to my house," said Karen. "But nobody's home and I'm lazy. Let's go to Midge's Lunch across the street."

"I brought a sandwich," said Drusilla, looking remote.

"Throw it away. I don't want to eat all by myself."

Drusilla, on the top of the ladder, began straightening the books in front of her, lining them up meticulously, patting them into an even row with her hand. "Waste not. Want not," she remarked.

"Come on. Come on," begged Karen. "Nice home-made soup they have."

Drusilla climbed down from the ladder. "Well . . ." she said. They started to walk across the reading room, between the small round wooden tables, each of which had four white wire contour chairs pushed in

around it. Everything at Colfax was contemporary in design—the furniture, the building itself, the aluminum lettering outside. When empty of people, it gave you a pleasant feeling of open space, tastefully decorated with book jackets, magazine covers, and the tree-sized philodendron by the glass wall. A brilliant Christmas mobile swung gently above the circulation desk.

"I have this delicious peanut butter and jelly sandwich," said Drusilla. "And besides, I don't want to put on my boots." She was now opening the door which led downstairs to the lounge in the basement. Karen frowned sulkily. "Oh, all right. I'll go alone." She followed Drusilla down the stairs and grabbed her coat off the rack, grumbling, "I thought you were my friend."

"Oh, well, all right." Drusilla sighed heavily and began to pull on her boots. "You sure it will be okay? You know what I mean. The restaurant." She turned her eyes toward Karen, a sober, measuring look on her face.

Karen shook her head. "It's not a restaurant. It's just a little lunch counter place. D'you mind?"

Drusilla wiggled into her coat, then elevated her eyebrows in order to put on a look of elegant distaste. "I don't mind the little lunch counter, but will the little lunch counter mind *me*?"

"Oh . . . Oh . . .," crooned Karen in sudden comprehension. She felt frightened and exposed. She was sure her face was turning pink. Her eyes started to water. She pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and blew her nose. It gave her time to decide what expression to put on her face. "You mean because of your color?"

she said angrily. "Of course not. Don't be ridiculous."

Drusilla smiled at her kindly. "I just don't want to go where I'm not wanted," she said.

"Drusilla!" cried Karen outraged. "There are laws about such things."

"I don't want to go."

"Chicken!" Karen had intended this remark to turn the whole thing into a joke, but instead she found Drusilla's face swept momentarily by some tightly controlled emotion. Her voice trembled. "You don't know what it's like. What if they make a fuss?"

"If they did, I'd never go in there again."

"Much good that would do me," said Drusilla. "I *am* chicken, honey. I've never been in any restaurant except just over there near Sheffield High." She smiled pleasantly. "Let me off this time."

Karen began to feel committed. She shook her head. "No sir! You've got to get over that. You can't go through the world imagining that you can't go into restaurants." She insisted, and in a few moments they were trudging down the sidewalk through the dirty slush. Waiting at the stoplight, Drusilla looked suddenly at Karen and said, "I'm going back."

"No, you're not," Karen cried, grabbing her arm. Through the thick woolen coat, she could feel Drusilla trembling. She pulled her across the street and into the shop.

They sat down in a booth. A waitress approached them, slapped down two menus, and went away. "See?" said Karen, grinning happily. "See?" But Drusilla went on shaking, and couldn't make up her mind at all what to eat. Karen finally ordered for her, and then began to talk, forcing herself to keep going. She told Drusilla

how Roger once came to class with his shirt inside out, and about Roger chasing the dog out of school with a blackboard pointer and then finding another dog there when he got back to class, and how she and Roger got stuck in a storm last year after the Christmas dance and had to walk sixteen blocks home through the snow. Then thinking she was talking too much, she said suddenly, "Now tell me about Jimmy."

Drusilla shrugged. "What's to tell? He's all right. At least I *think* he is. I wonder what you would think?"

"Why? What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing. Only sometimes he worries me. He's so nervous. Always jumping around. Always upset about something."

Sensing deep water, Karen asked, "Are you in love with him?"

Drusilla burst out laughing. "You kidding? That big lummox. I just go with him because he's there. He lives near me."

"Come on now," said Karen. "I bet he's nice. When do I get to meet him?"

"I wish you could," said Drusilla earnestly. "I really do. I'd like to know what you'd think of him."

"Make him come after you at work."

"He doesn't have a car, Sweetie."

"Then how do you have dates?"

"We go with somebody else. Or we go on the bus. Or we walk. Once in a while he gets his father's car, but not often. I wish you could meet him."

Karen said, "Next time he gets his father's car, come over to our house."

"I don't know if Jimmy would be willing."

Because I'm white, thought Karen. "Well, try," she said. "You know all this stuff about communication be-

tween the races. Tell him that. Tell him it's his duty," she said laughing.

"I know. I know. But he is stubborn." Drusilla paused for a moment as if thinking. "I wish he *could* meet you," she said urgently. "I wish. I wish."

Karen felt that their minds were making only a glancing contact, and that she did not quite understand what Drusilla meant to be saying. The feeling was too vague to allow any questions to be asked. Nevertheless, there seemed to be something behind Drusilla's words which was not being verbalized. Karen could not help wondering why she herself was never invited to Drusilla's house, or why Drusilla did not say, "You and Roger come to my house some night." She supposed it had something to do with the size of the Hill family, or the smallness of the house.

They were three minutes late getting back to work. The library was still not open, and they had to pound on the side door until somebody came to let them in. Everybody was standing around the circulation desk, Mrs. Forsythe in the middle, wielding pencil. Mrs. Palinchek and Miss Copeland, the other two librarians, had come in, and five pages were leaning in relaxed poses against the high desk and the low children's desk. Betsy was sitting on the low desk, dangling black legs and shaking her long hair. Nobody was working.

"Oh, there they are," said Mrs. Forsythe. "Come over here, girls. We're arranging rides for Thursday night. You are going, aren't you?"

Karen and Drusilla both agreed they would be going. "Well, now," said Mrs. Forsythe. "Betsy is going to pick up Joann. Mrs. P. is taking Mary and Paula. And I said I would

bring Angie, here, and Miss Copeland. Now who lives closest to Drusilla?"

Drusilla said quickly, "Don't worry about me. I can get there all right."

"How?" said Mrs. Forsythe. "I won't have you coming on the bus."

"Anyhow," interrupted Karen. "I'm pretty sure I can get our car, and I'm going to pick her up."

Drusilla laughed scornfully, tossing her head. "Oh, no, you're not. My Daddy will bring me down, or if he can't, Sir John will do it."

"Who in the world is Sir John?" said Mrs. Forsythe brazenly.

Drusilla's eyes grew very large as she glared at Mrs. Forsythe. "Sir John is my brother," she said impatiently, as though anyone should know that. Then she made a face. "The world's greatest nut."

"Oh," said Mrs. Forsythe. "What's his real name?"

"That's his real name. Sir John. You think that's funny, you should hear the rest of the names in our family."

It was well known that Mrs. Forsythe was nosey. "How many are there in your family, Drusilla?"

"Six."

"Well! How many girls and how many boys?"

"Three of each."

"Now tell us their names."

Karen began to feel like sinking through the floor for shame. It was too rude to be put up with. She was delighted when Drusilla said, "I can't. They're all under a spell. Speaking their names will turn them into frogs."

Everybody squealed. "Oh, come on, Drusilla." "Tell us. Tell us." "We already know two. Tell us the others." She was beaten down and resignedly

recited their names: Sir John, Drusilla, Captivate, Nabob, Juno, Biretta.

There was a burst of laughter from everyone except Karen, who felt that somehow Drusilla was being ridiculed. "Say them again. Say them again," begged the pages. Drusilla smiled benignly and recited the names with perfect dignity, as though she were speaking a poem. "Sir John, Drusilla, Captivate, Nabob, Juno, Biretta. We don't bother with these stupid, boring names like Mary and Betsy and Joann and Karen. My mother is imaginative. Let's face it—my mother is fanciful." She was making a joke of it, but Karen felt insulted for her.

Mrs. Palinchek, a tall gaunt brunette with a mild disposition and a tender heart, tried to smooth things over. "Such wonderful, unusual names," she murmured. "How did your parents ever think of them all?"

Drusilla shrugged.

"I knew a guy once," said Paula, "named Buffalo. He was an Indian."

"Drusilla Hill. That's a really pretty name," said Karen. "I don't know why people have to have the same names all the time anyway."

On Wednesday, Karen told Drusilla that she had received permission to drive the car and would call for her on Thursday evening. A long controversy ensued, during which Drusilla offered one argument after another. As Karen knocked one down, Drusilla threw up another, like a series of roadblocks; it was out of the way; Karen didn't realize how far it was; she would never be able to find it; she would get lost; it wasn't necessary anyway because Drusilla's father would take her. Karen won only when she appealed

for Drusilla's company as a favor. "Who else can I take? Everybody is all promised, and I don't want to go alone. *Please* let me."

"Oh, well. All right. I'll draw you a map."

"No," said Karen. "You don't have to. I know where Thurston is. I used to live over around there when I was small."

As soon as she said it, she was sorry. Drusilla would surely think that Karen's family had moved in order to escape the Negro families who were moving in. She looked at Drusilla, whose face had not changed. "We moved because we had to have a bigger house," said Karen, and immediately remembered that there were eight in Drusilla's family, and only four in her own.

"Oh," said Drusilla guardedly and without looking up. They were still doing inventory, but had exchanged jobs. Drusilla started to read the cards.

Karen could remember the talk about the encroachment of Negro families; the nasty story of someone who threatened to sell to Negroes in order to take vengeance on a hated neighbor; the tight, self-protective looks on the faces of people when they said, "Yes, but I have to think of my kids. I don't want my children to grow up on a street where it's *all* Negroes." She knew that by now the neighborhood where she had lived as a child was occupied almost exclusively by Negro families.

Karen said, "Drusilla," and made her look up. "My father needed a study. He does a lot of his work at home. And there weren't any Negro families on our street when we moved. We sold our house to a white family."

Drusilla smiled at her—a small, doubtful, forgiving smile.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"Sure, I do," said Drusilla. "Don't sweat it."

On Thursday, most of the slush had melted off, and there was no sign of new snow, a great relief to Karen, who, as a fairly new driver, had been wondering what she would do in a snowstorm. She mentioned this good fortune at dinner, tacking on a remark about driving all the way over there to get Drusilla. Her father sat up and looked at her, alerted like a railroad flasher, so that she knew something was coming.

The warning whistle sounded. "Who gave you permission to do that?"

"Why nobody, Daddy . . . I just thought . . ."

"You thought!" The train came chugging down the track and she couldn't get away. "When you asked for the car, you said you were going just downtown and back."

"Oh, please now, Daddy. If it's the gas, I'll buy some."

"It's not that," he said. "It's just that I don't know whether I want you to go into that neighborhood alone at night." The train was now blocking the crossing.

"For heaven's sake, why not?"

"It might not be safe," said her father, looking excessively severe.

Karen, to whom the thought had already occurred, felt angrier than she had any reason to. Merely to verbalize such an idea seemed to her a kind of betrayal. "What do you mean, Daddy? Drusilla's family lives there, and they never have any trouble. I can't imagine what would be dangerous about it."

Her father, looking doubtful, said, "Well . . . A white girl going into an all Negro neighborhood . . . Somebody might resent it."

"Now, that," said Karen, pointing her fork at him. "That's the kind of thinking that prevents communication between the races." He was shaking his head, looking down at his plate. "And stop being so protective, Daddy. You're just imagining things."

Her father opened his mouth and popped in a forkful of salad. "I don't know," he said with his mouth full.

"Oh, Daddy!"

He chewed and swallowed. "I don't like the idea."

"But Daddy. It's a nice middle-class neighborhood, not the kind of place where they have riots."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "I'm not talking about riots," he said.

"Well, what *are* you talking about?" said Karen impatiently. "What could possibly happen?"

"God knows," said her father.

"Besides, I promised Drusilla. I can't back out now."

This argument appealed to her mother. Between them they forced him to concede that the trip was probably perfectly safe.

"All the same, keep your doors locked," he said.

Confident that she knew where Thurston Ave. was, Karen started driving north on cross streets. However, when she arrived at the place where she thought it ought to be, no such street appeared. The area was one which had been laid out during World War II and built up immediately afterwards. Many blocks of small, box-like houses were lined up on a grid of perfectly parallel streets, or at least one expected them to be perfectly parallel until a school,

a church, or a park interrupted the design and deflected the streets from their natural course. Karen found Thurston at last, but before the house numbers had gone very far, the street stopped against a wire fence surrounding a water tower. Detouring around the tower, she expected the street to start up again on the other side. It wasn't there.

Dusk and getting darker by the minute. She felt for the locks on the doors. All were pushed down. *Now let's see. What shall we do? I know it comes out near the shopping center. Go down there and see if we can find it from the other end.*

At North King Plaza she looked for someone to ask. Pulling up beside the drug-store where a little clot of dark-skinned boys were standing, she rolled down the window just as one of them let out a long piercing whistle. It made her jump. Their faces seemed to split open, showing ivory grins.

Karen shouted at them in a loud voice. "Can any of you tell me how to find Thurston Ave.?" They shrugged their double-jointed shoulders in unison, looked at one another, shook their sculptured heads.

"Hey, I know," said one boy. "Down that street there." He pointed with his thumb. "Then watch. It down there somewheres."

"Thanks a lot," she called and drove off, glad to get away from them. *What am I afraid of? They're just people.*

Then she did find a street sign which said Thurston. The numbers were high and going backwards, so she knew she was in the right place, but by now it was too dark to see well. It was necessary to stop and get out to look at house numbers. The third time she did this, a half dozen

boys, shouting and laughing, ran out suddenly from behind a house.

"Hey, what you doing there, chick?" said one. "You lost?"

"She's out slumming," said another. In the falling night, they were only voices and dark forms.

"I'm looking for 2195."

"The hell you are." The tone was belligerent.

Karen knew she was close, for she had just seen 2180. She jumped into the car and moved it forward, parking in front of the house which she guessed must belong to the Hill family. As she turned off the motor and started to get out, she saw through the rear view mirror that the boys were following her. Quickly she locked the door.

"What you think you're doing, Whitey?" called one of them. Karen rolled the window up tight just before someone started to knock on it. A black face peered at her from each side. "Get back in your own neighborhood. Hear?" "2195. That's my house. What you want with my house?" She knew she ought to roll down the window and explain that she had come to call for Drusilla, but she was too frightened to speak or even to move. Mostly what she was aware of was the loud drumming of her heart, filling her ears with blood noises so that the voices of the dark boys sounded faint and far away. "She come to see you, Sir John? You got a new white girl friend?" They screamed their laughter and pounded on the window. *Like an animal in a cage. Should I start the car? I might run over them. I can't go without Drusilla. I have to wait for Drusilla. Blow the horn. Of course. The horn.*

She leaned on it—once, twice, three times.

This had the effect of enraging them. "Hey, cut that out. You can't do that here." "This is a *decent* neighborhood." "Go back and blow your horn in your own damn neighborhood."

They began to rock the car . . . three on one side, three on the other, pushing one way, then the other. Karen screamed and tried to get out, forgetting that the door was locked. As she fumbled with the latch, the car gave a great lurch and threw her across to the other side. *I should have had my seat belt on. Can I get it on now? The car's going to turn over.*

She grabbed for the steering wheel and pulled herself back under it. She could hear the gas slapping around in the gas tank as the car shook from side to side. Loud thumps and kicks struck one side, then the other. The air was full of hysterical laughter and the idiotic screams of her tormentors, encouraging each other. *Where is my seat belt? I can't find it. Oh God, is the ignition off? If they break a window, they can open the door and get in. What will they do then?*

She was breathing in little short breaths, and the tips of her fingers began to prickle. She hung on tightly to the wheel. *Daddy was right. Daddy is always right. Daddy will be angry with me if they break anything.*

Suddenly it stopped. A girl's voice was screaming and shouting out there among the boys. Then the angry voice of a man, and the sound of feet running on the pavement. Somebody rattled the door handle, and there was Drusilla's face at the window. But it was dark, and was it really Drusilla? "Karen, unlock the door," somebody shouted. But Karen, un-

able to reach across and pull up the button, sat staring at the person out there on the other side of the window.

Something gripped her violently by the ribs then, shaking her ribcage like a dice-box: out, in, out, in, making little bursts of noise. She clutched the steering wheel and laid her head against it. There was nothing else to do. A spurt of tears spilled from her eyes.

Then Drusilla's face appeared at the window beside her, shouting, "Are you all right, Karen? Roll down the window, honey. It's me. It's Drusilla."

Plainly it was Drusilla. Could one trust Drusilla? Slowly she rolled the window down. "Are you all right, Karen? Are you hurt?" Karen went on crying as Drusilla pulled up the button, opened the door, and reached in to put her arms around her friend. Karen could not make herself respond, but shrank away from the embrace.

"Come on. Get out and let's see if you're hurt or anything," said Drusilla. "Come on, now."

Karen drew back in terror. "Oh,

no!" she said. "No, I'm all right."

"Then open the other door and let me get in," said Drusilla.

Karen leaned across and unlocked the door. By the time Drusilla had climbed in beside her, she could feel the convulsive movements slowing down, letting go of her belly. Drusilla looked at her with serious eyes. "Are you sure you're not hurt anywhere? I'll bet you'll have bruises tomorrow. Those damn boys. I don't know what to do about those damn boys. There comes my Dad, draggin' Sir John home."

Karen couldn't think of anything to say. Her hands were shaking. She stared at Drusilla, sniffled, fumbled for the handkerchief in her bag.

"Jimmy was one of them, too," said Drusilla softly. "That Jimmy, I'll bet he started it." Her voice burst out on a high, desperate note. "And I wanted you to meet Jimmy, didn't I? Well, you met him. That's old Jimmy!" Suddenly Drusilla was crying too.

Karen said, "Oh, Drusilla!" and was able then to embrace her. They sat clasped together, tears streaming, like two mourners.

The Butterfly Bush

• Larry W. Ward

Like an old silent film
 They powder leaves stop-action
 With their tempera wings.
 Till yellowed from a summer's
 Use on the drive-in circuit,
 Their sharp focus melts in
 The heat of the light.
 Enslaved like dried leaves
 To the wind, but free
 In a flashbulb afterimage
 That glows beyond the
 Autumn funeral pyres.

This Side of Bahia Honda

• Armando Perri-Figueroa

The boy snuggled deeper under the dark warmth of the sheet, away from the summoning voice. "Juanillo." The way she pressed his hand in order that he always wake gently pleased him. In rain, the traffic in the street below sounded much different. Never was there such noise in Bahia Honda, only the stars and moon and sea wind in the mamonsilla tree near his window. Then he remembered. "Is it time?" He sat up. "Is it?"

"Is it so difficult to believe?" She made a face. "Or do you wish still to play games with your Mama?"

In the light of day, Candelaria lost much of the softness such moments lent her. Red and green neon flashes from the corner cafe made him want to close his eyes. At first, these colors splashing the darkness of a strange country, a strange room, had given him nightmares. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "Why must all journeys start in the night?"

"Clearly they do not."

"When we left Cuba, it was dark when Papa took us to the little boat in the mangroves. And was it not dark when they put us on the bus from Cayo Hueso? And now, *lo mismo* — in the dead of night."

"Quiet yourself." Candelaria turned to leave. "You are still in your dreams."

"Has Tio Carlos come?"

"Hurry yourself in order that there may be time to eat," she said from the doorway. "There is not time to feed your curiosity as well."

The rain spread a chill in the air. Juanillo shivered. Laid out with care were the shirt and pants usually saved for Mass. To quell his excitement, he took special pains tying his shoes. In the kitchen, Candelaria sat with both elbows on the table, cup held with both hands; yet she was not drinking the coffee. In a small box with cotton lay the gold medallion of the Holy Mother she had had Father Benitez bless.

"You said it is not for me," Juanillo said, "but I believe that is only to surprise me later."

Though her brown eyes settled on his face, focus was diffused through that same faraway look. "Have I not ever told you the truth?" She lowered the cup. "Me—your Mama?" His chin sank to his chest. So much was different now, he often did not know what to believe. She held him at arms' length. "You look so much—" Her chin quivered; then the impulse was gone, in its place a smile. "You look nice, Juanillo, very."

Each morning she would fill the coffee cup at Papa's place, the same as when he had sat there. Some doubt about what she might say had always existed, but as Candelaria placed a bowl before Juanillo, she did not seem to notice where he was sitting, going about her business in the kitchen with her preoccupied air. The smell of coffee and steaming oatmeal, strange in the middle of the night, made his stomach queasy. "Y *la leche*?" So much slipped her mind

these days. "Do we not have no milk?" Candelaria got it from the ice-box. The milk was important. Too much, or not enough, and the gruel would not make the bubbles when he stirred. He liked a bubble in each spoonful. "Do not play with your food," she said from the gurgling sink. "Only a baby does that."

He stared at the oatmeal. No longer did the bubbles seem amusing. In *bodegas* and neighborhood cafes grown men with black hair on their faces, as well as the *viejos*, would now and then stare into their cups with this silent surprise, even in a cafe otherwise raucous with argument. And white knuckled fists banging tables, the dominoes clattering to the floor. How the men cursed! Their sun-reddened eyes flashing retribution. Such vows were sinful. Also, they made him have fear. As Father Benitez had counseled, only his voice behind the saffron face betraying a strange uncertainty, whosoever attempted such an assassination for a certainty would be killed himself. Furthermore (the ecclesiastic face unchanged, as if already absolved of fleshy vicissitudes), no sin is cleansed by another sin. Juanillo liked this sad priest. Nevertheless, he conjured Castro dead. He could eat no more of the oatmeal. To vomit not only would disgrace himself, it would delay their leaving.

The creaking stairs always gave one flight warning. Candelaria claimed it was the sole convenience provided by this old apartment house. Tio Carlos, augmented by shadow and cigar smoke, seemed to fill the room. His brown eyes considered Juanillo, a bit skeptically, then Candelaria. She glanced down at herself, as if searching for some flaw he had spotted with such scru-

tiny. She was wearing the flower-print dress she had stayed up nights to make, her sewing machine humming Juanillo to sleep, after she got home from Burdine's, where she altered dresses. Carlos was a man who liked to sleep, however, and perhaps he looked gruff only from having to come at this hour. "*Esta listo?*" he asked.

"*Si*, ready." Candelaria considered the half-eaten oatmeal. "But take a *buchito* of coffee while Juanillo finishes."

"I have no hunger." He was short, with a belly and hairy arms. "Besides, there is no time."

Candelaria put the medallion in her purse and turned out the light. In the hall Juanillo slapped away two moths that fluttered crazily from the feeble bulb. At the staircase he turned suddenly. "The suitcase!"

"We need only what we are taking."

She had to nudge him to start down the stairs behind Carlos, who turned with a scowl. "Go quietly."

Juanillo had hoped to sit with his uncle, but they put him in the back seat. To reach the highway to the Keys, they had to drive across the city. Dampness from the rain made him cold, but after the windows had been rolled up, the cigar made his stomach queasy again. He watched for road signs. Some of the signs made no sense. He knew what Naranja meant, but why would a town be called Orange? Living here was a great confusion. For example, they were going to Cayo Hueso. This meant Bone Key. "Why in English is it said, Key West?"

"What a question!" Carlos shrugged. "Why is anything called what it is?"

"Nevertheless, Key West, I think, pleases me more."

Candelaria gave him an indulgent smile. "How can you like something you cannot remember?" she said. "It was in the night that we landed, and afterwards you slept."

"It was beyond belief," Carlos added, "how you slept."

"You remember only what you have heard."

"And the bridges . . . *Y Papa* . . . ?" He canvassed the images of his memory. In panic he opened his eyes for fear of what he might not find. "Do I not remember all that? Was it not Papa who said I must not forget? Especially such as the bridge of Bahia Honda since it is called the same as our home in Cuba?" Then he felt unsure. Its image was gone. "Is it not very high, as Papa said, and climbs straight into the sky?" His voice shrilled with concern. "How can this old coughing car go up such a bridge? Is it not dangerous?"

"You are nothing but a mouth full of questions and teeth," Carlos said. "Go to sleep."

The rain had stopped. Nothing but mangroves and water to the shoulders of the squishing asphalt. But if he let himself sleep, thought Juanillo, then he would have to be told. A man saw for himself. The air smelled better here than in Miami. Salao. The sea reminded him of home. "Are we going to take another trip at sea?"

"Why would we go on another sea journey?"

She was right. They could not return to Cuba. And where else would they go at sea? "Why are we going to Key West?"

Candelaria watched Carlos. He steered with only the one hand with the two last fingers missing. The

road ahead looked so narrow, it was terrible to see a large van approaching. Carlos did not slow the car, however, and the van passed in a roar that shook the car. "Try to sleep, Juanillo," Candelaria said. "It will make the trip shorter."

The salt air and the car motion and their silence made it easy. And perhaps he did doze off, once, that moment the wind pushed his eyelids shut. But the dream of the high bridge silver against the sky brought him awake with a start. He leaned forward and rested his forearms across the back of the seat. He tried to force his mind to see beyond the edge of the headlights. The road curved into the abutment of Snake Creek Bridge, just after Plantation Key. That would keep him awake: counting the bridges, noting each name, measuring its length by the speedometer. It was hard to believe there were so many. Before long he tired of straining to note the small numbers on the speedometer. And not long after that he lost track of how many bridges he already had counted. Now he could believe he had slept the first time over this road. The very thought made him more determined. This trip he would see the Bahia Honda bridge for himself. He closed his eyes. It was very strange. How could he picture something so clearly if he had been only told? Eyes closed to the spectacular within his mind, he felt a shadow, as when a cloud dark with rain blots the sun, sweeping from behind. He opened his eyes. "Tell me how we came from Bahia Honda." He loved to hear her tell about their great adventure. And when she spoke about Ignacio, his Papa, her voice grew tender, like her hands when she waked him.

Sometimes, however, he would look up to catch her eyes dolorous. "Tell me—"

"Perhaps it is better you have no memory of the bad time." Candelaria considered the dark expanse of sea. "But who knows?" She was questioning only her doubt. "You must never forget that we made such a trip," she added. "Much less the reason it was necessary."

"Claro." Certain phrases helped her in the telling, like refrains, and he knew by heart all the places to prod. "It was very dangerous."

"*Si*. First the patrol boats." Her voice had not yet caught the prime. "You were very good to stay so still."

"Even though I had but five years then?" It seemed impossible now.

"Even so," she said. "But the leaving and the patrol boats were nothing. After we . . ." Her voice caught the rhythm she used in narration—the details, their sequence, the pauses—always the same, as if she could spool time and unwind herself back into that skiff at the beginning. All she told he knew that he knew only from her telling. Only one part of that experience was seamed with his own flesh. And this he knew to be true because never had it been part of her telling. A squall had cost them what precious little food they had managed for the boat, as well as most of the water. And the rough sea rocking the boat. He could remember. And her rocking the baby at her breast when there was no medicine to be bought, nor doctor. And her holding him the same way. The rocking. And soon afterwards one night she had waked him as she had waked him this night, and Papa hurried them to the boat with their bundles.

"Papa was very brave."

Her cue to reminisce about the days before, days more happy. She had known Ignacio Cespedes from childhood, with never the thought that one day they would marry. She would tell how the church had smelled with flowers the day they said their vows. Candelaria loved their flowers, and she would describe how the roses and *galan de noche* had smelled the night she delivered him, Juanillo, the scent infusing the room so rich she had known he must be a beautiful baby, would so finely weave the texture of memory that he could smell the flowers too as he watched her finger the gold band, rolling and slipping it to the knuckle, and here like a flawed phonograph record her voice caught. Candelaria turned her face to the car window. But not soon enough, not before he saw. That same expression. Her face so drained, he had feared death had gripped her own heart the night Papa had returned home without the baby. Had returned with only that bone-weary glaze of one who has gone far distances and longer hours without sleep, neither hope, as he stood in the open doorway, quiet, awaiting her question, not in words, unspoken during the butterfly moment she forced her eyes to meet his unshaven face, a moment so private that he, Juanillo, had to make himself stare at his plate, finger the lumps of yucca, hearing only the floor creak under her rocker, a moment so fierce he had only to think of it to feel anew its pang. In a fearful voice he asked, "Is Papa dead?"

Denial flexed Candelaria's mouth and eyes so that her black brows lowered. Instead of speaking, she crossed herself. She looked at Carlos.

Juanillo threw himself back against

the seat. But his happiness was short-lived. A surge of resentment, like the passing of a van, shook him. "But why did you not tell me?" The brunt of accusation fell on Candelaria. "Why was a thing of such importance kept from me?"

"This place is filled with long tongues." Carlos threw out the cigar stump. He spit after it. "What trash, the tobacco put into the cigars here." He forgot the road to look at Juanillo. "Long tongues and longer ears. But you see, still you do not understand."

"Take care!" Candelaria warned. "We are still on the bridge."

Still the end was not in sight. Juanillo recalled the sequence of a very high bridge and a very long bridge; but he was not sure if Bahia Honda bridge came before the long one or after. Carlos was right. There was much that was difficult to understand. Not even Father Benitez always helped. "Will Papa be waiting for us in Key West?" he asked. "Are we to live there?"

"We are not going to Key West," Candelaria said.

"But you told me—"

"That is what I mean!" Carlos gave her a look of disapproval. "Long tongues, even you."

"But Papa? Where . . .?"

"*Le sumba el mango!*" Carlos spoke with a cloud of smoke from a fresh cigar. "Go to sleep."

Juanillo sulked. The cigar was giving him a headache. He had said a rosary every night to be reunited with his Papa; now he wanted something more. The fear he might not see the bridge at Bahia Honda worsened the nausea in his stomach. If they were not going all the way to Key West, they might not need to cross over Bahia Honda. If his Papa were wait-

ing somewhere on this side of the bridge— Clearly Father Benitez would chide him. He would say, "God does not like ingratitude." More than anything else he had wanted his Papa, and now that God had answered his prayers, he was not content: he now wanted to cross over the Bahia Honda bridge as well. That was ingratitude. He did not need Father Benitez to tell him. Perhaps to be denied Bahia Honda bridge was the punishment God had ordained. Not only for his ingratitude. Each night he also had prayed for Castro's death. So they might return to their home in Bahia Honda in Cuba. "To pray for death is sinful." Ay, but this Father Benitez was a sad priest. He worried so much about sin. And suffering. He always greeted new refugees with the same thought he had first brought them. "Suffering purifies the soul. As our Saviour suffered, so must we suffer." Then he would smile wanly at the taut faces of the children who learned already it is best not to reveal anything of the inner-self to the world. "But that is not necessarily bad. It is the measure of our worth."

The car bumped off another bridge and settled into the different sound of the highway. The rain had made the air more heavy. And Carlos smoked more, the longer he drove. Juanillo was tired of being cramped in the car for so long. He liked Father Benitez. Still, never could he comprehend how suffering purified the soul. Nor anything else. However, the soul was something difficult to understand. For example, his brother. When he died, did his soft little body change into a baby soul? And his own, what had his soul been like before changing into this body? Clearly this matter of changing from

one thing to another was a confusion and demanded much faith. Kind and wise though Father Benitez was, Juanillo thought, it was nonetheless difficult not to doubt he knew about suffering.

How he missed the sea! In Miami the air smelled of automobiles and garbage. In Bahia Honda he had always smelled the sea. He loved the sea and fish and the boats at the shore. Yet he would not want to make such a journey again. The sun those days they drifted had taken forever to cross the sky. There had been no shade, no way to escape the sun, always in his face no matter how he positioned himself in the cramped boat. And the sickness from the rocking of the boat, especially in the bad weather. Hunger was not as terrible as thirst. Never before had he known the sun to hang so long above his head. And as terrible as it was for him, what must it have been like for Papa and Mama, who had had nothing whatsoever to quench their thirst? But at the end his lips were too swollen and blistered even to take the milk from his Mama. All he wanted then was to sleep. At first he was sick from the rocking of the boat, but in time he had grown used to the rocking, and at the end he lost awareness of any motion at all, although he knew the boat must be rocking. For days after their rescue, as he lay in the hospital, he often would feel sick with the rocking of the sea still in his blood. Just before the Coast Guard had found them, the rocking had come to seem as soft and warm as his Mama's arms, and he liked it for the sleep it brought. The sea had soaked him, salt drying all over his Body, tiny grains that sparkled on the down on his arms, as if invisible sea worms were spinning a white web of

sleep around him. The spinning soft as silk enclosing him in warm sleep. Once he felt his arm pinched under his head, but the caul of sleep had settled so delicate over him he was afraid to make the slightest movement for fear of breaking the fine strands holding him so lightly. He did not even remember leaving the dinghy for the Coast Guard boat. He remembered only that once hearing his name—"Juanillo"—as if coming from a long way. "Juanillo." Then waking at his Mama crying/laughing when finally his eyes opened because she had feared him dead. And hugging him to her breast. And humming and rocking as he remembered once by accident opening her bedroom door to see her rocking with the baby held to her breast. And rocking him that same way until her rocking subsumed the motion of the sea, but that made him sleep too. The Coast Guard boat bumping against the pier at Key West. It was the bumping that jostled him awake.

"Water," he whined. "Ay—what a thirst I have."

Candelaria leaned over the seat and held his hand. The bumping continued. Juanillo sat up with a start. They had left the highway and were going down a marl road through bushes scraping the sides of the car. His thirst was forgotten in his alarm.

"The bridge?" He scrambled around so that he was kneeling on the seat and looking through the back window. "Did we cross Bahia Honda?"

In his heart he knew, even before Candelaria answered, that again he had missed seeing it. He searched desperately behind for some glimpse of the bridge, but nothing could be seen for the trees and brush. Too disappointed for words, he turned to

them with eyes flashing accusation.

"I called you," Candelaria said. "But you would not wake."

Carlos was too busy following the curving ruts without headlights to take his eyes from the path, but said, "Twice, she called you twice."

Juanillo drew back when Candelaria reached to pat his head. "Soon you will see your Papa," she said. "Is that not more important?"

The disappointment rankled him nonetheless. His eyes burned. But if he cried now, his Papa would notice, and he did not want him to think he was a baby who cried to have his way. The quality of the night had changed. The darkness seemed softer, perhaps because they were far from Miami. Carlos drove very carefully, very slowly. Candelaria was sitting forward, face close to the windshield, her back tense. "Are you certain you left the highway at the proper place?"

"I cannot be certain of anything." Uncertainty made Carlos curt. "Nothing. I told you before. I cannot be certain that this is the correct path. No. And if it is, I cannot be certain they will be there."

At the next turn the sea lay before them. Coconut palms rustled in the breeze. Carlos stopped the car short of the small beach for fear of getting stuck in the sand. "What a night for stone crabs," he said, with one sweeping look at the sky, the breeze, the whitecaps, the tide.

"What time is it?" Candelaria asked.

"We are on time." Carlos took the cigar from his mouth. "But remember—you must not be too disappointed if it has become impossible. As I have told you, there was opposition. A concession was made only because it was Ignacio." He pointed to the

dark clump of mangroves. "That must be the island."

Carlos got out of the car and walked the small beach. Then they heard him moving through the bushes in back. Candelaria rolled up the windows; the mosquitoes were so thick, and then they no longer could hear or see Carlos. Juanillo was awed. But he must not be a child and ask foolish questions. He sat very erect against the seat back. Senses cocked for the faintest impress. The mosquitoes in the car hummed like barbers around his ears. He jumped when Carlos opened the door and got in with a swarm of sandflies. "All is as it should be." Carlos looked at his watch. "The time agreed to is now. If nothing has happened—"

The words fell in Juanillo like lead sinkers to fish deep water. One disappointment of such magnitude was enough for tonight. But that was his own fault. What kind of man was that, a man who could not discipline himself to stay awake when necessary? His Papa would want to see that he was a son to be depended on to take care of things in his absence. Still, he was overjoyed that now his Papa would be with them again. The headlights in their sudden brilliance made him blink. Then as quickly Carlos turned them off. On again, longer. Off. Again. Then they waited. A light flashed from the mangrove island.

"We wait now five minutes," Carlos said.

He kept close watch on the time. He kept turning the cigar in his mouth as he chewed. Juanillo stood leaning over the front seat, staring at the dark mound offshore, hoping his Papa would not kiss him in front of the others he was with. Carlos flashed

the headlights twice in quick succession.

The roar of a motor shook the night. The noise throttled down as from the mangroves a launch emerged. Not far from shore, in what must have been a channel, a dinghy was lowered. Juanillo could make out the shadowy forms moving on the launch. The low drone of the engines lay like a muffle over the water as the dinghy was sculled ashore. Candelaria was opening her door. The men climbed from the dinghy and beached it. They looked alike in the same clothes. Juanillo clambered over the seat to get out the door Candelaria had left open. She was in the arms of his Papa, both swaying like palm fronds. Carlos was shaking hands and backslapping the other two. Juanillo noticed the guns the same moment his Papa came to him. In the dark his Papa's teeth seemed that much whiter when he smiled. They hugged each other, his Papa's hand patting his back. Their greetings, their words were very hurried, the darkness and droning motor adding to the confusion. Juanillo found himself with Carlos talking with the two strangers. The young one had a machine gun slung from his shoulder; his youth awed Juanillo. At sea glimmered the first hint of the dawn.

Candelaria and Ignacio stood off to the side of the beach, she against a coconut tree. Around them hung the air of nervousness, of silence, a strain, as if they were shy to touch each other, but wanting to. At one point Candelaria raised her hand, as if to stroke his cheek, but her fingers stopped short of his face, then fell to her side, as did her eyes look down.

A sudden throttling from the launch seemed a signal. In a moment

the youth with the machine gun and his companion were at the dinghy, one pushing it out, the other holding it in the tide. Ignacio held Candelaria's face between his hands and kissed her forehead. Juanillo struggled not to let disappointment show in his eyes as he looked up at his Papa's face. He reached up and kissed him; he did not trust his voice for a farewell. It was over, the dinghy moving out to the launch before he knew it. At the last moment Candelaria ran for the dinghy. "Wait!" Everyone seemed dumb with surprise. The two in the boat turned their faces, as if embarrassed, and Ignacio looked pained that his wife would shame him with hysteria. Carlos hurried after her to pull her away from the dinghy. Candelaria went splashing in the shallow water, fumbling in her purse for the little white box she had forgotten in the excitement. "A remembrance for you." She kissed the gold medallion and gave it to Ignacio. "To keep you—"

Carlos took her elbow and turned her toward the shore. Juanillo held open the back door of the car for her, then got in the front seat. The car motor drowned out the noise of the launch heading seaward. Carlos filled the car with grunts and the noise of his hands and feet as he labored to turn the car without getting stuck.

"It was so funny," Candelaria said, with a strange laugh.

Juanillo kept his eyes on the narrow road twisting through the tangled brush. Not until the car had bumped back onto the highway did Carlos turn on the headlights. As they headed back to Miami, the horizon to the right was suffused with the coming of the sun. It was strange that on the other side of the highway

the sky and sea should still lie in darkness. As the car leaned into the incline of a long rising curve, up ahead, in the last gloom of night, Juanillo caught sight of the high bridge across the channel at Bahia Honda. He knew without telling that this was the one. Not once did his eyes leave the bridge as the car followed the curve around and up until all that was left to see were the railings and pavement, until higher yet rose the final hump of the center span.

"It was so funny," Candelaria said, "to think how I almost came away with the medallion still in my purse."

From the top of Bahia Honda Juanillo could see for miles and miles in all directions. He noted the water rippling over some shoals, the little key and some sand banks, the swirling of currents in the channel—features to mark in his memory forever this drive over the Bahia Honda bridge. And with luck he might look

back to see the boat with his Papa, nothing but a speck now in the distance, almost lost in the glare of the sun on the sea.

But he did not look back. "Will it keep him safe?"

Carlos turned to him with a scowl. "What?"

Juanillo faced Candelaria. "The medallion."

"Did I not buy it from the sisters at the church?" she said. "Did not Father Benitez himself bless it?"

Her words only worsened his uncertainty, but he did not bother to say more. The face of Father Benitez had been evoked. In that saffron shaded gaunt face, Juanillo recognized now some insight why he seemed such a sad priest. Understanding was like having a terrible thirst. Water brought only a passing satisfaction that, in the quenching, quickened the thirst for more. Thirst worse than the time in the boat crossing.

Low-Flying Gull

• James Binney

Steel-girdered roof tops where you fly
in lonely exile from a tumbling sea
are far beyond lost meadows and the lane
and from the waters which you seek eternally.

We see an unknown, strangely soaring bird
against the drifting smoke below the sky,
a lovely gull who leaves his own loved waves
to join our restless caravanserai.

Figuring It Out

• John Fandel

Having to write a poem, needing to, may be the better cause for making one than wanting to, better because necessary. If it must be said, no choice, at least the poem will be essential. Something of true heart will beat in it, something of the pulse other than impulse, some energy of intellect. It will have mind; not half-wit, it is hoped, for the wit of knowing. Breath will form it, or breathing will. A gestation, not just a gesture, not a pose, the chance is the poem will have some veritable position.

The essential poem insists on being. A verse, a phrase, a word of it haunts the maker until the poem haunts the race. There is no problem of getting it by heart; it refuses the forgetting of either: it demands to be made to be remembered. The poem is too much a part of the rhythm of things to be put off, though it may be hard to get down, hard labor to put in black and white. All false starts must be got rid of, worked out into nothing, that the poem can have its say—its way. Its way, its medium, the maker it works through, may have to taste his folly any number of times to let the real thing come through, one and whole. False starts must be got rid of, undergone.

Once made, made to last, for better, not worse, the poem sings a little song of survival, akin to prayer, participating in similar grace. An audience, of one, the human heart, is the audience of one hundred and one, mankind. The poem takes one by surprise as it takes the poet unawares: it says what is a delight to think. At first the poet is diffidently amazed; he did not know he had it in him. Soon enough he knows the poem is not so much his as he labored to think so. He, too, has to learn the way of the poem. He did not guess it read his mind, knew his heart, so well, nor he his brother's.

The poem is their dialogue, one to one hundred and one; if one at a time, all at once. Half measures no metric, the stress, the accent scan knowing into wisdom. The poem begins in statement; it ends in endurance harder than a touchstone. It begins in darkness; it comes to light, becomes light. The poem begins in waiting; it ends as what we wait for, the endorsement of our first intention, if only a minor encouragement. The poem begins in wonder, ends in wonder, the final wonder more astonishing.

Beginnings are important because they contain endings. The creation, spring, baptism — the first word ought to have the last word, in it, as the seed the flower; as creation's baptism, spring, the resurrection. The last word of the poem has the finality of the ending, inevitable as the order mankind keeps working toward, rising into, in his awakening. And that inevitability should read readily as life, a gift received blessed. The first word of the poem implies the last; the final word takes in them all.

This is the summation that we count on. A promise is a promise, and the poem no trifle. We may count it out into syllables, take account of its numbers, clock a count-down on its action, hold it accountable. It should

figure. Figure it out, it still ought to figure. The figuring of the poem and the figuring out of the poem, first word to last, heart to heart, assess our forgetting into remembrance. A promise is a promise, and if the poem is no trifler, the poet and the reader alike renew their own to keep their given one. It is more than a fair exchange.

The exchange is sacred. Faithfully, the poem has its veritable position as a sign and does not bargain. All its words in place, purely one, an interchange of wonder and wisdom, the likely awe it figures, metaphor, the sign of the poem shapes a momentary once and for all. Worth waiting for, the little piece it speaks stands for a greater conception; the ancient way of metaphor does not end with the figure. Metaphor for the metaphor, rhythm for the rhythm, heart and mind for heart and mind, the poem for the meaning, the meaning for one and all, the poem comes into its own, its revelation, to sign our sorrow and our joy into its way of being our breath.

Lined Faces

● Burton L. Carlson

I.

Roadways across crabbed terraces, furrows . . .

Swale, swipe and ribs of transit . . .

Traces of deer hoof, of rabbit, of crow's claw . . .

Places of meeting, of takeoff, of entering into burrows . . .

Meadowground, stream—, lake—, riverground . . .

Thoroughfares . . .

All commercial chases, all natural dreads,

all imagined graces

wind under one white cone of heaven

and circuit one borough.

II.

Life's marriage of forces: horn, whisker, quill!

A mouse in yesterday's dust made such-size trails,

and following past what to him were hills

we found that our trap was successful.

One trail dies.

We pick up a myriad others,

convinced of ills . . . thinking to track down the dying,

walk smack into eyes!

The Specialist's House

• E. W. Oldenburg

Our Victorian
Man's house is one
of the seven wonders of our compact
academic world

Attic to cellar
roof to bottom
he's packed it with those treasures
nearest to his heart

Among period furniture
creaky but authentic
knick-knack and bric-a-brac and memento
gather sacred dust

Apparent welter
of unrelated detail
clogging every shelf and nook and cabinet
makes divinest sense

when he explains it—
which he'll do
at the smallest provocation
or none at all

In the attic (he says)
are all those relics (or reliques)
religious, metaphysical, ecclesiastical,
dusty now

but necessary
nonetheless
to explain some more solid objects
on the main floors

In the cellar
(and he admits he rarely goes there)
are interred the pornography and journalism of an age,
sub-literary remains

But the main floors
are his pride:
giant novels bulk and poets' busts
loom huge

Our scholar walks among them,
rearranges, dusts, dates,
decides momentous issues of place and rank,
source and influence

And gives them voices:
ventriloquist's dry reed piping,
polite and precise, he repeats what he means them
to have said

"I don't go out much
anymore," he told me once,
looking out a window framed with dust,
webbed and streaked

"My back-garden," he sighed
"That transitional decade
I've pretty much neglected, I'm afraid
and it's a shame—

I used to like
to putter there weekends;
now I scarcely know one shrub
from another"

He said nothing
of his front lawn,
that long expanse that sloped slant down
to the trafficked street

But I knew how
he hated it:
each rank weed and raw barren patch
of dirt

"You've a lovely house," I said.
His smile shone in the dust motes.
"You've no need to go out at all,
no need at all."

A Walk

• T. J. Henighan

Birds burn black holes in the sunset
Too gorgeous for words, my dear.
It is nice to walk these slack fields
Where what you might call nature
Needs a shave, and I a drink.
Isn't that coil of dust familiar
Even now that spring does its worst?
I think I recognize the road
We shouldered winter on,
Blowing our courage into every drift
Such as it was, such as they were.
Truth, however, which we both nailed
Spontaneously over our bed, shoves
Here all false remorse aside.
There is nothing in this ripe dusk
To remind me of you, except me.
I kick at every stump and clod
Swelling into analogy.

Philadelphia Reading of Hopkins

• Thomas Kretz

Tired hurry comet streaking eastbound
moonless turnpike unraveling skein
of dampened gray glinting from sharp light

passing poles and wipers synchronized
white guardrails lead-lid eyes hypnotized
low beam high beams glare smooth shield surprised

shoulder soft warning wheels panic fight
Ford roadward weaving fear pelting rain
heart in thump exit passed eerie sound.

Cleo

• Mitchell Hider

Two men in wrinkled gray suits sat facing each other with their hands on their knees, in an office enclosed by wire mesh on the second floor. Light came from a small window and an electric bulb over a portrait of the Virgin Mary.

The older man stood when Philip Manoof approached the office and dropped his suitcase. The other man stared into the space his companion had occupied.

"I would like a room please," Manoof said.

"No English," the old man said politely in English. His eyes, hands, and face seemed to be the same shade of pale yellow.

"No Greek," Manoof said. The other man grunted, dissatisfied with something.

"Do you speak French?" the old man asked.

"I speak a little, yes," Manoof explained he wanted a room for three days. The old man nodded as though he understood.

"America?" he asked.

"America and Lebanon," Manoof said in Arabic. It was obvious from his dress and speech he was American, but he was a second generation Lebanese, and sometimes preferred to be known as an Arab.

"Do you speak Arabic?" the old man asked in an Arabic dialect Manoof vaguely understood.

"A little bit," he said. The old man nodded, settling the language problem.

On the third floor, he unlocked the

door of a room that contained a bed with sheets, a table and chair, an oval sink, an open closet, and a Greek calendar. The window was open but there was no breeze. Athens was hot in August.

"It is very good, thank you," Manoof said. They shook hands, and the old man left.

Manoof unpacked to shave but did not find an outlet for his European electric razor, so he walked back down to the office. The old man saw the razor and nodded. His companion had left.

He shouted into the hallway, waited a few moments, and shouted again. Manoof, inside the cage office, heard shuffling feet.

A girl appeared in the doorway, stopping abruptly when she saw him. The old man allowed her a few seconds, then spoke. They pulled a dusty trunk from a corner of the office and slid it under the portrait of the Virgin Mary, refusing help from Manoof. The girl kicked off her sandals, stepped onto the trunk, and unplugged the light over the picture. That side of the room turned deep gray.

"If you please, sir," the old man said in French. Manoof stepped onto the trunk and bounced as if to test its strength. The old man flexed his bicep and said, "Very strong." The girl nodded agreement.

Manoof tried to hold a hand mirror, the razor, and the wall, and the old man saw he could not. He spoke to the girl, she kicked off her san-

dals again and got up on the trunk with Manoof to hold the mirror.

She giggled and spoke rapidly to the old man when Manoof touched her hand to steady and position the mirror. The old man grunted, sat down with his hands on his knees, and watched.

By the time Manoof finished shaving, he and the girl were perspiring heavily. She had moved closer to him, and he could smell her. When he switched the razor off, she jumped down and Manoof followed, thanking her and the old man in Greek.

She got back up and relit the Virgin Mary.

"Is she your daughter?" Manoof asked in French.

The old man laughed, and she immediately asked what Manoof had said. When she was told, she looked shyly at one man, then the other and laughed. It was throaty, deep, and very masculine.

"She work here, the chambermaid," the old man said. As he translated, she studied Manoof's face.

"She is very good at her work, yes?"

"Yes, she is. The only one," the old man said.

Manoof thought she was more like a school girl than a chambermaid. She wore a brown wool skirt with a hem below her knees, a green loose-fitting sweater, and imitation leather sandals. She was plump with a potential figure. Her legs were quite hairy, and her feet were fat and embedded with dirt. She was probably sixteen years old.

He could not make out her name from their conversation in Greek and did not want to ask it, so he assigned her the name *Cleo* because he thought her hair looked like Cleopatra's—

straight cut, symmetrical, shiny black.

Cleo's eyes were large and deep brown, making her sort of beautiful, sort of homely, sort of vibrant, sort of tragic.

Twenty minutes later Manoof was on his way out, when the old man waved at him from the office.

"Would you have coffee with me?" he said in Arabic.

"Greek coffee, I hope. Thank you," Manoof said in French. He walked into the cage and sat down opposite the old man, in the chair the fat man had occupied earlier. The old man called into the hall, and Manoof heard Cleo's shuffling. She went into the next room, and he heard water running into a metal container.

"What is your profession?" the old man asked.

"I am a man of the books," Manoof replied, not knowing how to say that he worked in a bookstore and taken a three-month leave to travel and try writing poetry. The old man nodded.

"What is your age?"

"I am twenty-six."

"New York?" he asked in English, proud of the word. "Brooklyn?"

"Yes, New York," Manoof said. He lived in Syracuse, but New York was close enough.

Cleo entered with two small white cups on a brass tray and set it carefully on the table. She handed each man a cup and sat on the trunk.

The men spoke in their French and Arabic, and bits of the conversation were translated for Cleo. It was never clear whether they understood each other, but everyone had a good time.

During a lull when the men sipped the coffee, Cleo turned obviously to face Manoof.

"Okay?" she blurted, as though it

was the first sound she had ever made.

"Okay," Manoof replied. Her face glowed with pride, and she looked at the old man for approval. They repeated the word and the old man tried it, too.

"A real breakthrough," Manoof said in English. The old man nodded and Cleo looked puzzled. Then she brightened and sprang her big one.

"Me . . . you . . . go . . . , America . . . no?" She accented the phrase with a swooping hand like an airplane.

Manoof nodded a sort of congratulations and said, "That is very good." He spoke in French, so it could be translated. Cleo chuckled, looked at both men, and repeated her sentence.

"I wish to speak Greek now," Manoof announced. After learning what he said, Cleo immediately launched a lesson.

She spoke directly into Manoof's face, mouthing each word and pausing for him to respond. She laughed when he repeated some of the sounds, elbowing the old man.

They exchanged sounds for twenty minutes. The old man tried to translate some of the words for Manoof, but it wasn't always clear.

"You speak Greek well," the old man said in French.

"Thank you," Manoof said in Greek. "Thank you, professor," he said to Cleo in a combination of Greek and French.

Manoof finished his coffee and looked at his watch. "I wish to see Athens now," he said to the old man. "Thank you for the coffee and the words." They both stood and Cleo and the old man spoke in unison.

"Me . . . you . . . go . . . , America . . . no?" she said.

"Yes, very good," Manoof said in French.

At the Acropolis, Manoof met coincidentally a Syracuse University student, a pretty blonde named Linda, who was traveling for the summer. She had been at Syracuse for three years and said she knew the store where Manoof worked. She said she recognized him.

"I though you were Greek, standing next to that column," she said, as they walked through the ruins, "but your clothes gave you away."

"I pass for several nationalities," Manoof said. He had the olive complexion, dark brown eyes and brown hair, and was not tall. "You certainly look like an American girl, though."

He thought it sounded offensive, but she simply said, "Why, thank you."

"How do you like Greece?"

"Oh, I just love it. I adore the ruins and the music and the dancing."

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"I got here yesterday. How about you?"

"I've been here a week, but I just moved into a new hotel this morning. Well, it's not exactly new."

"Which one?"

"I don't know the name, it's in Greek. It's a small place somewhere over there," he pointed. They were sitting on a piece of fallen column, looking at the city.

"When are you going back to the states?" Linda asked.

"I'm not sure yet. I want to stay a few months, but I might go back early in September."

"Oh, you and I might be flying back together, or no?" Linda asked. He didn't hear her, though. He was

looking away, staring to the right.

The no-smoking and seat-belt lights blinked on. Manoof buckled his belt, but Eula's had not been opened throughout the six-hour flight. She looked out of the window, her shiny black hair complementing the blue curtains.

"We will be in New York very soon," Manoof said. His wife turned and smiled.

"Your home is near?"

"We must drive for three hours. But first we will visit New York City. It is big, like Athens," he said slowly.

She nodded, although it was difficult for her to understand more than two sentences in succession.

Eula wore a simple white dress and white low-heeled shoes. He watched her look at other women as they passed in the aisle.

"You look very beautiful, Eula," Manoof said in Greek. The girl looked at him, then toward the floor shyly.

A few minutes later she asked, in Greek, "Your mother, she is like my mother?" When she was nervous, she fell back to her own language.

"Very much like your mother," Manoof said slowly in English. He had learned more Greek than she had learned English in the two years, but her studies were intensified when they decided to go to the United States. She had asked many times about his mother.

The plane banked slightly, and they caught a glimpse of cities below. Manoof used his hand to explain how the airplane circled and landed, and she understood.

"Remember how you made your hand like this?" he asked.

She laughed, a deep sound that

emerged from her mouth and eyes, the first of its kind since they left Athens.

"It was when you came to Greece."

Exaggerating the pauses, Manoof said, "Me . . . you . . . go . . . , America . . . no?" She laughed again, covering her mouth with her gloved hand when a woman across the aisle looked over at them. She poked his arm playfully.

"You are a crazy man, Philip," she said in Greek

"I do not understand Greek, Eula. You must try to use English now," he said gently. She repeated in English.

"Remember the first day in the hotel, with Spiros?" he asked slowly. "I did not know your name, and named you Cleopatra." She nodded, comfortable in the memory. "And the marriage?"

Eula sighed and pushed his arm again. "You danced with Spiros and my father and uncles and fell down," she said. They laughed aloud.

It was what Manoof had imagined a real Greek wedding would be like. A long table of food. Wine. Music. The men dancing. Whitewashed church in a village. Olive trees.

He wrote his first good poem that night, despite a severe headache from the wine. During the next year he wrote more than one hundred good poems.

"We must teach my brother the Greek dance," Manoof said.

Eula looked out as the plane dropped and paralleled the ground. When it bumped down onto the runway, Manoof said, "We are in New York."

He had rehearsed it probably fifty times in his head. He had written his parents about the wedding, of course, and about Eula's family, how she

spoke English with difficulty, how she looked, and how they might act at the airport at first.

As best he could, Manoof had described his family many times to Eula. He assured her they would like her, although she had never dared ask that question. There was nothing else he could do now.

As the plane stopped, Manoof got their coats and his briefcase of poems. Eula looked pale and like she might faint.

She said in Greek she couldn't walk, but calmed down when he spoke to her.

"Goodbye now, folks," a stewardess said.

"Yes, thank you," Manoof said in Greek.

Manoof saw them on the second level of the observation area as soon as he and Eula entered the customs area. He did not tell her but studied them himself. They waved. His mother smiled briefly and held a handkerchief.

Eula said nothing as an official inspected the bags and asked questions. Manoof did the talking and handled her papers. As soon as it was over, they saw his parents, and Eula recognized his mother immediately.

She stood in front of Eula and said in Greek, "Welcome."

"Thank you," Eula said in English.

"The grocer taught me the word," his mother said.

They stood awkwardly, quietly, for what seemed minutes.

"Well, you look a little fatter, Phil," his father finally said.

Eula laughed

"Sorry, I didn't hear you," Manoof said to Linda. "I was dreaming."

"About what?"

About a fat Greek goddess and a brilliant scholar who falls in love with her peasant ways."

"Sounds interesting," Linda said. "Well, we might be flying back together. I'm not on a charter and can go anytime."

Manoof nodded.

"Did I ask you what you're majoring in?"

"Physical education," Linda said. "Did you go to the university?"

"For two years. I majored in English. I'm trying to write some poetry over here."

"Oh, how exciting, a poet! You're in the perfect place, you know," she said.

"I know."

They explored the rest of the ruins and then walked down into the city. She was staying at one of the fancy hotels near Constitution Square. He walked her home, and they stopped along the way to have a beer in a tiny tavern.

"Do you want to come in?" she asked. "The room is a mess."

"Thanks, Linda, but I would like to get back and do a little writing," he said, knowing that excuse would appeal to her.

"Oh, sure, I understand, Phil. Well, maybe we can get together sometime."

"What's your room number? I'll call you later." He took the number, shook hands with her, and left. It was at least a two-mile walk, but it was cooler and he would take his time.

Manoof got back to the hotel at 5:30, spoke briefly to the old man through the wire mesh, and went up to his room for a nap. He was exhausted from walking all day in the sun, something only tourists do.

He removed everything but his slacks and stretched out on the bed, leaving the door open for better circulation. Several minutes later he heard the shuffling sandals go into a room down the hall. Manoof got up and stood in his doorway.

"Hello," he said in Greek as she came out of a room carrying a small box, a broom, and some cleaning rags.

"Hello," she said in English, smiling. "Okay?"

"Okay, Cleo."

She stared at Manoof until he realized it was because he was wearing only slacks. He waved and returned to his bed. When he heard her stop near his door, he closed his eyes and breathed heavily. The shuffling moved down the other side of the hallway and into another room.

About twenty minutes later he walked barefoot down the hall and saw her in the room next to the toilet.

She was sitting in a chair staring out of the open window. Her sandals were off and her toes were curled under, against the floor. She leaned on one hand and unconsciously bit into the side of it. With the other hand she tried to scratch the small of her back. The room was gray. The broom, box, and rags were on the unmade bed. She did not hear him approach because of the street noise.

"Cleo?"

She jumped and moaned from being startled. When she turned and

saw him, she put her hand up to her mouth as if to muffle words.

"Sorry to frighten you, Cleo," Manoof said in English.

"But I figured it's about time I said something to you in English—because I know you'll never understand it."

She stood, her face showing definite signs of fear. She looked around the room helplessly, not seeing anything, and spoke rapidly in Greek.

"Cleo, I just wanted to say—well, I don't know what I wanted to say. I just want to talk to you in English for a few minutes," Manoof said calmly. "Don't panic, though."

Cleo babbled back in Greek, her brown eyes widening. She started for the door, but Manoof was there. Her face began to form a cry and she bit her lower lip.

"It frightens you, doesn't it, not being able to understand English. You know, Cleo, I could never teach you enough. I could never learn enough Greek," he said.

"Please," she said in Greek. He understood the word.

"Okay, Cleo, okay. I'm going now."

She reacted to "okay" but couldn't cope with it in the midst of the other words.

"We could never go—well, you know," he said as he walked away. He went into the toilet, slammed the door, and stood next to it, his eyes closed. He waited until the shuffling passed and disappeared down the hallway.

You Taught Us Good

• Claude Koch

Monsignor Stephen Dent, Superintendent of Schools of the Archdiocese of Mt. Pleasant, had begun his labor that afternoon over accounts that a blind man could see would never balance and never render justice. A tall, tired, aristocratic man, with a long back and a long neck, and a short temper that simmered with a smokeless burning behind a facade of ice, he stiffened at his coffee break when the special delivery letter came from the Catholic Teachers' Association requesting a conference on contracts.

"There is no Catholic Teachers Association," Father Dent said. He flipped the letter across the desk to his assistant, Father Fly, and gave no more thought to the matter. A week later, Father Fly corrected him: he nicely rearranged the lace curtains of the Chancery window, scrambled in his throat, padded heavily across the room to the coffee urn, and as he drank said, "They're here, Monsignor."

"Who's here?"

Paul Fly wiggled a finger away from the handle of his cup toward the window, and rolled his eyes.

In charity it must be said that the Monsignor had stood the elephantine indirectness of his assistant for three years, and had even developed some degree of indifference to it. It was Fly's innocence—or foolishness—not his manner, that the Monsignor relied upon. He was that rare administrator who believed in checks and balances. He swallowed a sigh, arose, and swept aside the window curtain. His

pleasant and comfortable face, that no amount of asceticism seemed to affect, filled momentarily with blood, but his expression did not change.

Outside the monumental window, directly below him, paraded pickets to the number of five or six. It was cold, and scarves flapped in the wind. Signs tilted as their bearers struggled to support them and still keep their hands in the warmth of their coat pockets and their chins under wraps. The signs spoke rhetorically:

*Does the Archdiocese Believe
in "Rerum Novarum"?*

"4500 A Year"—

A Living Wage?

Three Kids—Three Jobs

Father Fly came to his side and jostled the Monsignor behind the curtains. The big fellow could hardly desist from throwing his weight around—age, if scarcely wisdom, had removed it from his control. "Sorry, Monsignor," he said. "Sorry. Why, that's Walter Noonan! I remember him as a kid in the C. Y. O. What a nice boy he was!"

Monsignor Dent turned upon his assistant the same detached glance he had directed toward the marchers. "This was *your* C. Y. O.?" he asked. His voice, for one sensitive to it, was honed to a knife's precision. His smile was as economically thin as a sliver of ice. But Father Fly was immune: "Yes," he said. "And what a fine backcourt man he was! That was the

year we took the Eastern Coast Tournament for St. Aggies."

"And what do you think he'll expect to take this year?" Monsignor Dent asked.

"Take?" Father Fly sucked his upper lip. It was a sign he was in deep water. "He's teaching at Archbishop Cérnek. Why should he take anything?"

"Exactly. Now, Father, you trot down there please and get me the names of those promenaders." The Diocesan Superintendent of Schools returned to his coffee. "Cold," he said with disgust.

"Take their names? You mean ask them their names, Monsignor? How can I do that?"

"Well, ask your friend Noonan. You'll find a way." Stephen Dent placed his palms flat on the table and leaned forward like the Archbishop himself. "His Eminence will be in from the Bahamas tomorrow. I won't have him run into *that* . . ." One more alert to such things than Father Fly could have completed the sentence: *this* is trouble enough. The Superintendent's eyes shifted ever so slightly to the last sad ledger of school accounts.

"He'll never tell me," Fly said mournfully.

"Catholic Teachers Association!" Monsignor Dent lifted his chin toward the window. "They'll be unionizing priests next!"

Father Fly had some gossip on that, but he had also a last-ditch instinct for self-preservation; so he kept it to himself. He had always been a timid man.

ii

"Hello, Walter." Father Fly blew into the roll of his fist. "Now what are you doing out here?"

That fine backcourt man of yesterday leaned his sign against the iron fretwork of the Chancery railing and, in chill and embarrassment, blew also into *his* fist. "You ought to be out here with me," he said. "What are *you* doing over there?"

Father Fly was genuinely shocked: "Walter! I'm not *over* anywhere. I'm just about my job. In fact," he spoke without guile, "I'm here to get some information for the Monsignor."

Noonan pulled back the sleeve of his overcoat. He caught his gloved finger in a lining thread and muttered. "I'll buy you some coffee," he said. "My hour is up."

"You're as bad as the Monsignor, always sloshing coffee." The priest slipped an arm through Noonan's. "But I'll go with you, for old time's sake, even if you are a commie."

"And you? Are you still the old man's footstool?"

"Walter, Walter, you don't understand him. He's a good man. And there's a great change has come over *you*. What do Sally and the kids think of your parading around like a sandwich man?" Father Fly shook his head at the world. "It's not like the old days at all."

"You can say that again. Let's try H & H's." They threaded the tail end of the picket line, and crossed by the fountain of St. Joan in the Cathedral Square. Ice, formed on the point of her lance, thrust a jewel toward the cathedral dome, and her visage, normally serene, goggled shockingly out at them through a slurred visor of ice. From across the square, where they paused and lighted cigarettes, the pickets were small and discouraged under the vast renaissance portals of the Chancery, each huddled and displaced and frosting the air with his breath.

"Now look at that," Father Fly said. "They'll all be sick by tomorrow. They look like panhandlers back in twenty-nine."

"A very apt description," Walter said. "Come along, or your natural charity will overcome you."

Father Fly had never understood why he should have been chosen as the Monsignor's secretary. It was times like this that bowed his head to the yoke. His success had been with boys — as parish moderator of C. Y. O., and then as Archdiocesan Director of all Catholic Youth Organizations. He wasn't even a good buffer for the Monsignor. But he had a wonderful memory for his boys.

"Do you ever see Pete and Michael Stacey?" he asked. They had been Walter's great boyhood chums.

Noonan tugged at his arm: "Do you want to be killed?" The Volkswagen rounding the curb at Sixteenth Street lurched and roared away. "They're both at Republic Can, packers or something."

"It was a great team we had that year."

Noonan softened. "Yes. I think of it sometimes. I saw Wally Jansen last week. He's back from Vietnam — a sergeant, no less."

"I must call his mother and get to see him."

The cold was so persistent that five yards inside the revolving door at Horn and Hardart's the tables were empty. "We'll try the corner," Walter said. "You go sit down and I'll get the coffee. Buns?"

"No, thank you." Father Fly felt better as he hung his coat. He sat mightily and propped his chin in his hands. A passing diner bobbed his head: "Good afternoon, Father."

"Well, a fine good afternoon to

you," Father Fly said. He meant it now. What a grand boy Walt had been! Watching him as he popped nickels into the automatic coffee dispenser, the priest saw what no one else whose absent gaze might fall upon that nondescript back could possibly see: the long, frail arms of adolescence, accomplished as a maestro's, moving easily with the ball down the backcourt at St. Agatha's. That was twenty years ago and Walt Noonan was sixteen. Fly sighed. He himself had been in his early forties then, and it had been a great feeling to have the boys needing him, hanging on his words as Coach—greater than all the parish work put together, greater than anything that had happened since. He had been happy.

Noonan turned, the two cups out before him. It wasn't so easy now to see the boy: not so much the natural fleshing and hardening of age—Fly was accustomed to that—but the grace, the open-handed ease . . . ? Ah, well, perhaps he imagined it—it must be there, under the coat a bit too wide at the shoulders, a bit too short in the arms . . .

"I remembered you take cream," Noonan said. He hung his coat beside the priest's.

"Tell me about the children, Walt. I've not seen you in a dog's age."

"Paul's in the eighth grade at St. Aggies." Noonan looked over his cup, and Father Fly blushed at his own name. Walter Noonan spoke gruffly: "He's quite a ballplayer, you know."

"How could he be else with such a father?"

"The twins are in seventh. Doing well. There may be a scholarship next year for Sal. God knows I don't want her over at that factory where I teach if I can help it."

"Now, now." Paul Fly patted Noo-

nan's arm. "It's not as bad as all that. There are a number of fine young teachers like yourself. . . ."

Walter Noonan smothered a growl in a gulp of coffee. "And the baby," he said grimly, "is in the fifth grade already."

"Time . . ." Father Fly shook his head. "Who would have thought twenty years ago. . . ? By gosh, I can still see you down there at the play-offs in Maryland with that big colored boy looming over you. . . ."

"Yes," Noonan smiled faintly. "I must say I took his measure that day."

"Thirty points from the outside!" Father Fly remembered with admiration. "A great day!"

"You remember Charlie Waters."

"Indeed I do. He caused us quite some trouble in the semi-finals with Saint Joe's."

"He's over there in the line." Noonan waved his cup toward the Cathedral. "He's teaching math at Bishop York. Has two kids playing with Joe's this year."

"Imagine! I guess he was so bundled up I didn't recognize him."

"Hank Wittaker will be coming on at four. He has three girls, remember?"

"Good old Hank, best center in C. Y. O. ball that year."

"Yes. Quite a few of them are in the Catholic system now. And," he set his cup down firmly, "you can be sure they're in the Association. Bowers, Jenkins, Baldy—all of them. They'll all be outside your digs. Wave to them now and then."

"You know I will," Paul Fly said. *Digs*, of all things! Walt was literate, and even as a boy there had been that slight, delightful affectation, that half-mocking tone. He had been, in many ways, a delicate boy, with gen-

tle, almost feminine tastes. "But what are you doing out there? You know the Archbishop won't tolerate this. What good will it do?"

"Do you remember," Walter's voice had a shocking, unpleasant note to it, "do you remember that I wasn't the only one 'loomed over' in Maryland? Sometimes the big boys get their measure taken." He stood. "We'll have a team now—trained in the C. Y. O., as it were. You might say that you helped train us, Father."

"But your loyalty. . . ."

"It's *your* loyalty I'm worried about." He held the priest's coat. "I've another hour to go. You know," he said over Father Fly's shoulder, "you can't blame us for believing what you taught us. . . ."

"I . . . ?"

"All of you," Walter Noonan said bitterly. He threw his scarf around his neck. "We believed all of you."

They walked back in silence which, on Father Fly's part, was contrived of bewilderment and sorrow. He understood the quixotic temperament of boys—but there was no malice in that. He would have to get out of this office where even the familiar faces appeared shadowed. They walked apart. At Sixteenth Street he was very careful of traffic. Before the fountain Father Fly tugged at Walter Noonan's arm and pointed—it was the sort of thing the boy Walter would have liked: underfoot in a great mirror of ice the bronze dome of the Cathedral swelled into a chalk-blue sky. Pigeons rose like dark *ave's* flung from a broken rosary. But *their* faces, leaned over the lip of the frozen water, were cracked and strange. Walter stooped, and a rock broke the Cathedral tower. Father Fly gasped. The water beneath

was dark; and through the virgin wool of his new coat, the priest felt the chill.

"I wonder," Walter Noonan said, "if the Archbishop knows we've the unions with us?"

"My dear boy, what possible difference could it make?"

"It's the end of school consruction, and deliveries. *They* won't cross the line. . . ."

The sign was where he had left it. Father Fly shook hands with Charlie Waters. Hank Wittaker arrived, stringy and droll as ever. It was quite a reunion, even if the snow did start in the middle of it.

iii

Monsignor Dent made notes on his desk pad. "I guess you saw a few friends out there," he said.

"Yes." Father Fly was nostalgic. "There's many of the old C. Y. O. crowd. It's been years since I've seen some of them: Charlie Waters, Hank Wittaker, Baldy, Jenkins, Bowers . . . what teams we had in the city then. . . ."

The Monsignor wrote carefully. "Well, perhaps you'll see some more of the old crowd tomorrow. . . ."

"Perhaps," he went into the adjoining room. There was the noise of washing. He came back, drying his hands. "Will the Archbishop meet any of their demands?" he asked.

"The Archbishop won't see them." Monsignor Dent placed his pen meticulously in its holder, annoyed that the splashing of water lingered in his ears. "And they'll get short shrift from me. In fact, they'll get support from no one."

Father Fly sucked his upper lip. He could have corrected the Monsi-

gnor then, but he decided, with his last-ditch instinct for self-preservation, to wait until the morrow to mention the unions. And perhaps even his own misgivings. . . . Instead, he went to the window.

"Why, there's even Obie Peters," he said.

Monsignor Dent listened to the dripping of water and the ticking of the clock, sitting erect and composed behind the desk with the chill dignity that was so appropriate to his state. At the window, Father Fly blocked what little natural light there was left, his huge shoulders ruffling the drapes, an ungainly and foolish and grotesque figure for that renaissance frame. The Monsignor sighed that darkness should come so early, and with so much still to be done. He straightened from the desk and walked quietly up to his subordinate. He tapped him on the shoulder. As Father Fly stepped deferentially aside with the sad clumsiness of a shy big man, the Monsignor saw the buildings beyond the square lodged against a leaden sky, and the snow powdering the pickets and their signs. Against the element that flurried and obscured, they flapped their arms and scarves; and passers-by bent to the storm. Who would notice them now? The storm had risen quickly indeed.

Monsignor Dent looked at Fly. The priest's eyes met his, a harmless beatific smile on his face and memories of an uncomplicated past in his eyes. How could he recognize out there Obie Peters or Charlie Waters or Hank Wittaker or Baldy or Jenkins or Bowers—or Joan of Arc, for that matter: a sparse, discomforted rout indeed to clutter the chancery portal.

"They were wonderful boys," Fa-

ther Fly said "and I wasn't much of a coach. I could never understand how we won." The shy smile embraced Father Dent, and excluded and defined the austere and lonely places beyond him in that room.

The Monsignor sighed again. He went back to the desk, turned on the light, and crumpled up his notes. Let

the Archbishop come home on the morrow—there were some accounts that a blind man could see had to be kept open on the books. For who could balance them, who render justice? At the same time, his temper smoldered. He knew he had been had, and he was not quite sure how it had come about.

Thaw

● Richard Loomis

When you smiled at what that foolish fellow'd done,
The daffodils were still a month
From swinging out of earth,
And past your window, leafless treelimb
Crossed the river's drift.

Yet how we caught our breath and gazed
And sunned us
In your smile (turning your eyes to meet our eyes!)
As folly melted out of sight.

Leave-Taking

● Janet Lombard

Death's certainty was on him like a wizened badge;
Who, wheeled in white, trembled the awful smiles
Of bearing up, groping for valor through
Vague woods of pain.
Oh, he was terminal and going home.
Huge instincts snatched him vertically apart.
In his drowned sight the doctors almost
Crossed themselves. While the chair chilled and
Held him up, he padded through poised seas of
Curiosity, like Israel, and breathing waves rolled
Back. The door sprang out on hinges of false
Hope and blew him living air like a great kiss.
A taxi snarled and stopped to snap him up;
His blood cried back for what lay broken in
The lysol room where now they took out cards
And crumpled flowers. Sunblind, he lifted
In the arms of healthy men and felt
His life slip in a blaze of seas.

Contributors

ILORIE KUSTER has won several awards for fiction at writers' conferences, and *Red Cedar* (fiction) at Michigan State University recently accepted one of her stories. She is the mother of two grown children and formerly was employed by the library at the University of Akron, Ohio. LARRY W. WARD had a poem, "My Love True Blue," published in the previous issue of this magazine. ARMANDO PARRA-FIGUEROA has had his work accepted by *Kansas Quarterly*, *Laniel Review*, and *Quartet*. He took his master's degree in writing under Andrew Lytle at the University of Florida. JOHN FANDEL, writing of his "Seven paragraphs of a statement," says, "I think it has some weight. It has been mulled over for a long time—four years—so I think it doesn't run the risk of being just talk." He is an editor for *COMMONWEAL* and teaches at Manhattan College. JAMES LINNEY, whose writing has appeared in a number of magazines, is a member of the English department at West Chester State College. PURTON J. CARLSON writes from Reston, Virginia: "I am a Manpower Specialist under contract to the US Labor Department and Ford Foundation to give technical assistance to employment and job-training efforts around the country." His poems have appeared in a number of periodicals and newspapers. F. W. OIDENBURG took his doctorate at the University of Michigan and is currently teaching creative writing and literature at Grand Valley State College, Allendale, Michigan. T. J. HENIGHAN had his poem "Landscape: North of England" in the November 1968 number of *four quarters*, as did THOMAS KRETZ, with his "Blotch of Novice." MITCHELL HIGER, graduate student at the University of Oregon, is the United Press International correspondent in Eugene. RICHARD LOOMIS, Dean of King's College, Wilkes-Barre, is a frequent contributor to this magazine. JANET IOMBARD is a graduate of Miami Dade Junior College, Florida, and has been writing poetry and acting in minor plays in both New York and Florida during the last two years. "Leave-Taking" is her first published poem. CLAUDE KOCH, novelist and professor of English at La Salle College, has been closely associated with *four quarters* since its founding.

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